



June 22, 2022

Mr. Kowalski

I am writing this letter in response to your letter dated May 11, 2022. I have put together the information on actions the Yakima Health District (YHD) has taken and is currently working on within the Lower Yakima Valley Groundwater Management Area (LYV GWMA). The content of this letter describes our efforts to date and future efforts to protect the public from the effects of high nitrates in groundwater.

The Yakima Health District has a long history of addressing nitrates in the Lower Yakima Valley GWMA. In 2011 we partnered with Yakima County, and state and federal agencies to implement the Nitrate Treatment Pilot Program; between 2012-2018 our agency served on the LYV GWMA Groundwater Advisory Committee (GWAC) and its working committees; and currently we are a member of the LYVGWMA Implementation Committee. YHD is considered the lead agency on four action items in the implementation plan and a partnering agency on two additional action items. Those recommended actions are listed in order of priority with the number of GWAC votes and the implementing agencies listed in parentheses:

2. Collect data from ambient groundwater monitoring wells (42 – Yakima Health District)
  - In process. The Washington State Dept. of Ecology is currently operating the groundwater monitoring for the LYVGWMA.
4. Publish and distribute homeowner guide on how to maintain septic systems (40 – YHD)
  - Completed. This information resides on the LYVGWMA website in English and Spanish: <https://www.yakimacounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/13372/What-You-Can-Do-7-things-Well-Water-Health-Final?bidId=> and <https://www.yakimacounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/13590/EPA2002b-homeowners-septic-guide?bidId=>
8. Establish or maintain ongoing, extended funding necessary for the Yakima County Department of Public Services and YHD to actively participate in water quality improvement, testing, monitoring, scientific data analysis, and infrastructure development. (35 – Ecology, Yakima County and YHD)
  - YHD, working with partner agencies, has successfully participated in securing state funding in the past, for the Nitrate Treatment Pilot Program, LYV GWMA

Program Planning, and early implementation activities. The Implementation Committee continues to look for new funding sources and grants.

12. Study potential nitrate contamination attributable to improperly operated septic systems. (32- Yakima Health District)

- Not currently implemented.

15. Develop a bilingual, health-risk education and outreach campaign (28 – DOH, YHD, and Yakima County) This action item is currently in progress. The campaign is being developed with data collected from our recent focus groups, which will inform a targeted outreach effort to be implemented in partnership with DOH and Yakima County. (See Yakima County's response elsewhere for a complete list of outreach conducted since 2010)

36. Require new developments outside towns to address potential impacts on groundwater quality (19 – YHD)

- This is built into our standard septic permitting and well site approval processes.

**Past efforts.** YHD was the critical communications liaison between health care providers and the GWAC during the LYV GWMA efforts, notifying over 300 providers of the GWMA planning, and issuing a health care provider survey. YHD also conducted two in-the-field surveys: 1) YHD administered the 466 high risk well sampling surveys during LYV GWMA Program Planning, and 2) administered a detailed household survey to identify homeowners' knowledge of their wells. YHD also provided technical information to homeowners and fielded homeowner and renter calls during outreach efforts. YHD's work informed the LYV GWMA's groundwater data collection, as well as providing the link between the GWAC and the households it was addressing. efforts.

**LYV GWMA Free potable water pilot program.** Currently, the Yakima Health District is partnering with the Washington State Dept. of Health and the Washington State Dept. of Ecology to establish a pilot program of delivering free potable water to households affected by high nitrate concentrations in their drinking water. We currently have 42 households that have signed up and we are providing potable water to 181 individuals at no cost to them. Funding is currently secured for this program through 2022 with the hope of securing funding for the foreseeable future.

**Community Focus Group Campaign.** Additionally, the Health District held a series of focus groups that involved community members and partners that are located within the LYV GWMA. The goal is to get input from the community in terms of alleviating the high nitrate concentrations in their drinking water, and to provide education and outreach to the community on the high nitrate concentrations within the LYV GWMA. The data collected from these focus groups is currently being analyzed to assist in taking the next steps in offering resources to the community in the LYV GWMA.

**Nitrate Test Strip Distribution.** We are also in the process of making nitrate test strips available to residents to further identify and/or reaffirm those households that currently have high nitrate levels in their drinking water. We will also use the outreach to inform them of the potable water delivery service that is currently available. We intend to partner

with Yakima County to identify the best means of test strip distribution and return rates, based on successful previous nitrate test strip distributions in the LYV GWMA.

The Yakima Health District continues to permit septic systems and review water systems. These occur throughout Yakima County as part of our process to ensure that septic systems and public water systems conform with state and local regulations. A key component of our process is conducting site evaluations for septic suitability. Our staff evaluates if the required horizontal and vertical setbacks to wells, surface water, and groundwater are being met according to the state requirements. This allows us to evaluate sites individually for new construction, septic system alterations and repairs, adding connections to an existing well, and construction of a new well or water system. During this process we evaluate the feasibility of a property being able to connect to public utilities. If any boundary line of a property is within 200 feet of a public sewer line we require connection to the public sewer, unless the public utility informs us that the property cannot connect at this time.

The Health District also conducts well site evaluations for existing domestic wells, as well as proposed new wells to be used as a two-party shared well, Group B water systems, and Group A water systems. In addition, evaluates water quality and quantity for Yakima County's water rights program. The Health District evaluates the existing or proposed physical location of drinking water wells to determine that there are no sources of contamination within the standard one-hundred-foot sanitary control area around a well. Additionally, during our evaluation of water quantity and quality we require a coliform and nitrate sample for a well to determine if the well is negative for coliform and if nitrate levels are a concern. If nitrate levels are over the drinking water limit of 10mg/l then a treatment system is required to be installed and an additional sample showing the nitrate levels are below the 10mg/l limit before the Health District will approve the well for use. If a well has a nitrate sample over the trigger level of 5mg/l and under the limit of 10mg/l, the Health District will issue educational material about nitrate exposure with our approval.

In conclusion, the Yakima Health District is committed to being a good partner with our state and local agencies so that the Implementation Committee can continue to move forward in achieving the goal of alleviating community members from high nitrate exposure and lowering the level of nitrates in the groundwater in the Lower Yakima Valley. Funding continues to be our biggest barrier, but we continue the efforts to secure additional funding to help propel the Implementation Committee's progress.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Shawn Magee, R.S.  
Director of Environmental Health